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*The Difficulties and due Discharge of the
Ministerial Office in the present Age.*

A
S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,
At St. MARY's,

On SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1757.

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THO. RANDOLPH,

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MATT. X. 16.

Behold, I send you forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves: be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves.

THESE Words are taken from the Charge which our Blessed Lord delivered to the first *Labourers* He *sent forth into his Harvest*. The Former Part of them, and the Verses immediately following, are so peculiarly expressive of the Dangers and Distresses which attended them in their Conflict with the Principalities and Powers of the World, that one would at first Sight be tempted to think, they were calculated only for the Season of Persecution, and could not be with Propriety apply'd to succeeding Ministers in more peaceful Times of the Church.—However, a very little Consideration will shew us that the Fate of Christian Teachers in every Age is not so far unlike that of the first Planters of the Gospel, but that all of them at their Mission may fitly enough be said to be *sent forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves*.—Since the Times of the Apostles there never have been wanting *grievous*
A *Wolves*

Wolves devouring the Flock: Heresies and false Doctrines have been the peculiar Growth of some Ages: Enthusiasm and Ignorance have triumphed over Truth and Soberness in others: And for a very long Succession of Time, Christianity was so much obscured and defaced by the Inventions of Men, that it has been difficult to discern it's Genuine Beauty.

It would by no means be an unpleasing or an useless Speculation, were we to take a View of the Christian Ministry contending with some or other of these Difficulties in all Ages; and to trace through every Period of Ecclesiastical History, the Rise and Progress of the various Events that have disturbed the Peace, or threaten'd to sap the Foundations, of the Church of Christ. Such Disquisitions certainly merit our Attention, and will afford us much Instruction. They are however rather to be the Subject of private Contemplation and Enquiry, and cannot well be treated of in a Discourse of this Kind: It will be, I trust, more useful, and more proper for such an Audience as this, where many Persons are preparing themselves for the Office of Priesthood, if we consider how far the Words of the Text may be applicable, and what Instruction they may afford to those who are at present engaged in, or design to undertake, the Work of the Ministry. This will in some Degree appear, if we,

First, Enumerate some of the principal Difficulties which we may naturally expect in the Discharge

Discharge of our Office from the prevailing Manners and Fashions of the Times; and then we may consider,

Secondly, How necessary the Advice contained in the latter Part of the Text is for regulating our Conduct, and enabling us to preserve our Integrity *in the midst of a crooked and perverse Generation.*—*Behold, I send you forth as Sheep in the midst of Wolves: be ye therefore wise as Serpents, and harmless as Doves.*

The first and most striking View of the present Times presents us with the Prospect of a People sinking by Degrees from the manly Virtue, Wisdom, and Frugality of their Ancestors, into the Dregs of Folly, Effeminacy, and Extravagance: Not to insist on the most atrocious Crimes which too commonly pass uncensur'd under the Notion of Spirit and Gallantry, nor on that fashionable Kind of Robbery which prevails daily to the Ruin of whole Families; even amongst those who are not arriv'd to the highest Pitch of sinful or ruinous Pleasures, expensive Feasts and trifling Amusements seem too often to make up almost the whole Business of Life; and it is look'd upon as no ordinary Degree of Merit if a Man is ingenious enough to add any Improvement to Luxury, or can luckily introduce a new Folly into the Circle of publick Diversions.—Were it not for the Mischief that the Community suffers from hence, it would be pleasant enough to observe the ridiculous Lengths

which this insatiable Love of Pleasure leads Men into; any Absurdity may be brought into vogue if it comes recommended by the Charms of Pleasure and of Novelty. But all Dispositions to Mirth or Pleasantry on the Occasion will soon be check'd, if we reflect that amidst this Folly every Thing serious is well nigh lost; — that it is with Reluctance the most important Concerns in Life are attended to:—that Religion and publick Virtue are frequently made a Jest of;—the most respectable Characters treated with Contempt, and Christian Conversation branded with the hard Names of Cant and Hypocrisy. A bad Prospect this for a Preacher of the Gospel. —When *the People spend their Time in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new Thing*, he must expect that when *he shall preach Jesus and the Resurrection from the Dead some will mock*, and others put off the Consideration of these Matters to another Season. He will probably, among these People, find to his Mortification that serious Discourses will appear to his Audience *but as idle Tales*, nor can he flatter himself that he shall, without great Difficulty, awaken those Men to a Sense of their Duty who, from an habitual Attention to Pleasure, have learnt to look on every Event with Indifference, however alarming it be, unless it immediately affects their present Enjoyments.

Pleasure being confessedly the Characteristical Fault of the Age, and Love of Novelty, of course, the ruling Passion, it is not wonderful that the Ministers of God's Word should find a
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second and main Difficulty, from being obliged to combat with a Variety of new and strange Doctrines. — The first Planters of the Gospel found it a very hard Matter to overcome the general Prejudice of Mankind in favour of their old Customs and Laws. Such a Partiality is not to be wonder'd at; Men have usually been scrupulously tenacious even of the Errours of their Ancestors. — When the People have *itching Ears* Times will alter in this respect, and accordingly the general Voice of Prejudice is in favour of new Opinions, and strongly against all that have been establish'd. Hence every malign Insinuation to the Prejudice of the Christian Religion is sure to meet with Applause; it's very Antiquity, which is at least a presumptive Argument in it's Favour, is sufficient to make some People averse to it, and any new Opinion will meet with an implicit Reception from the same Set of Men, for the very Reason that it's Truth ought most justly to be suspected. This is perhaps the Reason why we see the Truth of Christ's Religion denied by open Enemies, and it's fundamental Doctrines continually attacked by pretended Friends. Heresies long ago confuted, and, it was hop'd, finally extirpated, have in this Age been reviv'd with great Success: --- It is only to dress them up in a new Form, that they may look like modern Inventions, and there are never wanting those who will readily subscribe to them.

It happens unfortunately too that the same Cause which has made this Poison abound has
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made it more deadly. Arguments against Religion are urged with great Advantage to those whose Interest it is to wish those Arguments well founded. A bold Assertion will with such Men pass for irrefragable Proof, and any trifling Objection will have Weight with those who will not be at the Pains to look into an Answer.

Pleasure and Infidelity have spread themselves very wide and among many Ranks of People, but it is hop'd they have not yet descended in any great Degree to the lower Sort; at least to such of them as are removed from the busy Part of Life.--Yet amongst these Men a Teacher of God's Word will oftentimes find very great Difficulties. Those who have experienced the Ignorance and Obstinacy that are frequently to be met with in more remote Places, know that from thence arise much Trouble and Vexation to their Teachers. These Things indeed are not peculiar to the Times; they have been felt and complained of at all Seasons, but it is to be fear'd that they have gain'd additional Force from the Complexion of the Age. If it is observ'd that a Disregard for Religion prevails among Men of Rank and Figure, the lower Class will be likely enough to follow their Example, will learn to disregard and despise *those who care for their Souls*; and from their low Education will contract such untoward Habits as may make their Pastor's Life very uncomfortable.

Again :

Again : The conscientious Minister will find his Endeavours for the Salvation of Men sensibly obstructed at some Seasons, by the Fury of Faction, and the dreadful Consequences of political Contests. Disputes of this Kind are the natural Parents of uncharitable Strife and Animosity, which too often end in a settled *Malice, Hatred, and ill Will*, destructive of that *Love, Joy, and Peace*, which are the distinguishing Marks of a Christian's Character.---Nor is this all ; in those Seasons of Confusion, Luxury, Intemperance and Debauchery are not only thought innocent but even laudable, and a blind Attachment to the Interest of a Party supplies the Place of every Virtue. The Christian Minister who is unluckily situated in the midst of these Tumults will have enough to do to avoid giving Offence by his own Conduct, and must besides labour to re-establish a Spirit of Benevolence amongst Men whose Sentiments are contracted by the narrow Spirit of Party, and must take all the Care he can that the temporary Gratifications of Riot and Luxury do not form themselves, in the lower People especially, into settled Habits of Intemperance, Idleness, and Debauchery.

The Poverty of the inferior Clergy is another great Obstacle to their Labours. It makes them appear contemptible to unthinking People, and of course lessens the Influence of their Precepts and their Examples. Besides, Distress is a sore Trial of their Integrity, and lays them under strong Temptations to mean Actions and sordid Compliances.

Compliances.---At least; it will dispose Them to Murmuring and Complaints, make Them discontented in their Stations, and consequently less vigorous and active in the Discharge of their Office. This again is not a Difficulty peculiar to the Age, but is probably more severely felt now than ever it was; Pleasure, and Expence which is the natural Consequence of it, have produc'd a Venality among the People of this Age unheard of in former Times. Hence Ecclesiastical Benefices begin to be consider'd as mere Matters of Property, and are, it is fear'd, too often dispos'd of for private or lucrative Considerations. --- By this means want of Fortune is a Bar to the Hopes of indigent Merit, whilst the fashionable Expences of the Age make a proper Appearance more burthenfome than ever.

I have now, as I propos'd, gone thro' some of the principal Difficulties attending the ministerial Office in the present Age. Let us proceed in the *second* Place to consider how Discretion will regulate our Conduct, and enable us to do our Duty in the several Circumstances above mention'd.

Men of Pleasure may be properly enough divided into two Classes. --- Some there are who have drank so deep of the Cup of Folly, as to be almost incapable of serious Reflection, or of attending to Admonition; the Voice of Conscience is quite stifled; they are not only lost to Religion, but to the Charities of Nature, and in
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one Word, scarcely *superior to the Beasts that perish*.—In such a State wholesome Advice is vain : To talk with such Men on the Subjects of Divine Truths, is manifestly to *cast Pearls before Swine*, who will not fail to *turn again and rend us*.—When this therefore is notoriously the Case, the Minister of God's Word will despair of Success, and abandon such wicked Men to follow their own Devices, and to reap the certain Fruits of such Iniquity; Shame and Wretchedness in this Life, and Torment in the next.—Unless God Almighty, mercifully severe, should send some kind Affliction which may make them think seriously of the Errours of their Conduct.---Afflictions will, if any Thing, convince them that this World *is not their Rest*. It is almost natural for Men to call upon God in Time of Trouble ; in such Seasons if the Mind be in any Degree tender and susceptible of religious Impressions, the watchful Minister may find Opportunities of pressing home, and with great Advantage, the comfortable Doctrines of the Gospel, the surest Refuge in Time of Distress, our only Hope in the Day of Trouble. Should the Sinner hearken to these Things he will find much Cause for Confusion and for Comfort : He will be confounded when he reflects on the Vanity of his former Pursuits, and the little Satisfaction he has reap'd from a Life of Pleasure ; and above all when he thinks how much he hath offended his God : He will be comforted, when he considers that his Case is not desperate, that God is a merciful Being, and that if he

now turn from the Wickedness which he hath committed, and doth that which is lawful and right, he may still be happy, may still save his Soul alive. Should these Reflections have due Weight and make a lasting Impression, the Minister who hath thus converted a Sinner from the Error of his Way, will have the exquisite Joy of saving a Soul from Death, and shall bide a Multitude of Sins.

But Reformations of this Kind, though not without Example, are I fear very rare ; whatever good Thoughts a Man habituated to Pleasure may entertain in Time of Affliction, they are apt to wear off with the Distress, and he returns to his former Course of Life *like the Dog to his Vomit*, heedless of any good Resolutions which Calamity may have extorted from him. The Approach of Death only will teach him better Thoughts. When that awful Hour, the Period of human Greatness and human Folly, comes in View, how will he be able to support his drooping Spirits who hath no Foundation in himself ? Human Pride and Obstinacy will go a great Way, but they seldom or never support themselves to the last : An horrible Dread of what is to come overwhelms the Sinner, who would now willingly give the whole World, were it at his Disposal, to purchase that Peace and Tranquillity in his last Moments, which they experience who *die the Death of the Righteous*.—The pious Pastor, if call'd upon, will now be witness to an affecting Scene indeed ! a Body worn out with Disease, and a Mind dis-
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tracted with the Horrors of Despair. And though in these Circumstances he can administer little Comfort; yet he will not refuse a wretched Brother his friendly Assistance in his last Distress: He will not only beseech God earnestly in his Behalf, but give him such Counsel as shall seem most expedient for so desperate a Case; and, though he dare not pronounce that God will accept the faint Efforts of a Deathbed Repentance in Atonement for a Life of Guilt, he will not encrease his Despair; he will leave him to God's Mercies through Christ, and have the Satisfaction of having done his own Duty; and from such Examples as these (and such every Parish Priest will meet with) a forcible Argument may be urg'd to a *Second* Set of Men, who, though they rank under the Class of Men of Pleasure, are by no means arriv'd to so high a Pitch, and it is to be hop'd are by far more numerous than those I have mention'd. I mean those who are in no Sense abandon'd Libertines, are, at the bottom, Friends to Virtue and Religion, but whose Gaiety of Temper, Fondness for Amusements, or peculiar Set of Company, have not suffer'd them to think much about Religion---And whose Age, Situation in Life, or even their too good-natured Compliances have not left them quite free from some of those Vices which are recommended by the additional Temptation, such as it is, of Custom or Fashion.

These Men are in a very critical Situation, and, according to the Turn they take, will be

happy or miserable in themselves, useful or pernicious to Society ;--- and, if they are of Rank and Distinction, may be a Blessing or a Curse to their Country. To bring them to a right Way of thinking and acting is therefore a Matter of no small Importance, and it will require rather Art than Labour. --- It will be happy for their Teacher if he has, by the Benefit of a liberal Education, gain'd some Knowledge of the World, at least so far as to understand the proper Manner of Address. He will then easily make himself agreeable to them, and so far as he can, consistently with his Innocence and without giving Offence, he may freely mix with them in Company and Conversation : Such Persons he will find have often Intervals of serious Thoughts ; these he must cherish, and if he have their Esteem, he will find frequent Opportunities (and he must neglect none) of reminding them of their Duty. He will take care to represent to them how unworthy a rational Creature a Life spent in Folly and Trifles is ; he will call upon them to reflect whether they have yet experienc'd any calm and solid Happiness amidst the Hurry of a Circle of Pleasure ; he will point out from daily Experience the natural Tendency of a Life of Pleasure to Poverty, Shame, and Wretchedness. --- On the other Hand, he will shew the strong Connection between Virtue and Happiness, he will display the solid, substantial, and unfading Pleasures of Religion.

Much Mischief has been done by the Indiscretion of some People in this Matter. Religion
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has suffer'd greatly from the Misrepresentations of Enthusiasts, who have describ'd it as a gloomy joyless and unsocial System, laying unreasonable Restraints on Mankind, and subjecting them to great and almost intolerable Austerity. And it cannot be denied that such Doctrines have sometimes had a surprizing Effect on peculiar Tempers, and Men have been suddenly stopt in their full Career of Pleasure by these Means. But then the Imagination is rather wrought upon than the Reason, and they have run into another Extreme, from Debauchery to Enthusiasm, and have rather been remarkable for the extravagant Flights of Phrenzy, than the calm and rational Fruits of genuine Piety. --- The prudent Minister of God's Word will endeavour to remove any Prejudice that may have arisen against Religion thus represented, by describing her in her true and genuine Charms. She will be then seen not to wear a frightful but an inviting Aspect, not calculated to harass and oppress, but to enliven and support Mankind: Tho' her Appearance be not gay, it is directly opposite to melancholy. --- The Minister having thus put the Matter in a fair Light, and shewn, as he easily may, that Religion doth not hinder but improve all the Pleasures that a rational Man ought to desire, he will next take care, especially among the People I am now speaking of, that his own Behaviour be an Illustration of his Doctrine. Let him avoid all Affectation of Severity and Moroseness, and by a frank, open, and ingenuous Deportment, shew these

these Men, that a serious and unblamable Conduct, with the strictest Regard to Decency, may be very agreeable ; that they may be sprightly without Buffoonery, lively without Riot, and chearful without Levity and Dissipation : If by such Conduct and such Admonitions, he can prevail on his Hearers to attend God's Ordinances, and to relish those exquisite Pleasures which a grateful Mind feels in praising God ; that Joy which results from a Consciousness of having done our Duty, and that pleasing Serenity and compos'd Alacrity of Heart which ever attend the good Man ; the Business is done : at least there is a fair Prospect that he who hath heretofore study'd only to *rejoice in the Days of his Youth, and let his Heart cheer him in the Days of his Youth, and walk'd in the Ways of his own Heart and the Sight of his Eyes*, will now in earnest remember his Creator and cast off the Follies of *Childhood and Youth* before those *evil Days* draw nigh when he will, of course, say *he hath no Pleasure in them*.

Habits of Pleasure are, it must be confess'd, very bewitching ; and though many may, and it is hop'd will, be reform'd in Time by some such Method as this, yet perhaps it will be impossible to say that this, or any other Means that can be thought of, will be always successful in removing the ill Effects of a long Custom. The surest Way is to prevent such bad Habits from taking Root, and this may be done by applying with Diligence, and laying proper Restraints in the early Part of Life : A Minister therefore
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ought to exert his utmost Diligence in forming the Minds of Youth, and laying in their tender Years the solid Foundation of Virtue and Piety.

The Growth of Infidelity being in a great Measure the Consequence of the Pleasures of the Age, it is manifest that whatever tends to prevent the one, will have a general Tendency towards hindering the Increase of the other.

However, the almost enthusiastick Zeal with which these Doctrines of Infidelity are propagated by Men who would not be thought Men of Pleasure, is certainly very alarming, and will require that the Minister of Christ should watch with the utmost Attention over his Flock, and preserve them if possible from so fatal an Infection.---The Generality of those vaunting Performances which are intended to subvert the Gospel of Christ, are so void of Argument or even the Shadow of Reasoning (unless pointless and personal Abuse, or insipid and blasphemous Raillery be taken for such) that a Man of Sense will think them beneath his Notice; and yet even these, if they are found to perplex weaker Minds, are not wholly to be neglected. — But, not to undervalue our Adversaries, it is certain that the Love of Novelty and Fame hath of late Years enlisted some truly ingenious Pens into the Service of Infidelity. — Such Men are not to be despis'd; when Infidels assume the Air of Reasoners, it will be expected that we be provided with our Answers. And thanks be to God such have never been wanting: To the Honour of
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the Church of *England*, and of these Seats of Learning in particular, such able Advocates have arisen for the Truth, that Christianity has gain'd additional Strength from every Controversy. Each Attack of the Gospel has prov'd a farther Illustration of it's Truth, and every Cavil against it's Doctrines has conduc'd to the making them better understood. Thus by the signal Providence of God, *whilst the Waters of Infidelity have rag'd and swell'd, and the Mountains have shook with the Tempest of the same; The Rivers of the Flood thereof have made glad the City of God the holy Place of the Tabernacle of the Most Highest.*— It would be Arrogance in me to pretend to lay down Rules for the Management of Controversies, and it will be needless too, as it is certain that the Bulk of the Clergy will not, nor need they, be concern'd in controversial Writing. Yet all in their respective Stations ought to be provided with such *Armour* as may enable them to *repel the fiery Darts of the wicked one.*

To this End, one scarcely need say that all should take great Care to understand well the Grounds and Foundation of their Faith in Christ, and be ready to give a satisfactory Account of the *Hope that is in them.* It will be necessary too that all should endeavour to learn a clear and nervous Manner of Expression, and farther, that a due Attention be paid to the Art of Reasoning: This will not only enable us to put our own Arguments in a strong and forcible Light, but to unravel with Ease all the Intricacies of Sophistry and Scepticism. A Man of
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real Abilities may without this find himself embarrass'd or even silenc'd by a Fallacy, and his Adversary will seem to triumph merely from a Dexterity in shifting the Point in Dispute, and perpetually varying from the Question, which a Master of Argument knows how to guard against.

It must here be observ'd, that when we are thus prepar'd, it will require some Prudence to distinguish the proper Time and Place where we may make Use of our Weapons with any Prospect of Advantage. We are certainly not to be provok'd to enter into a Dispute upon every idle Cavil, nor can we be oblig'd to *answer every Fool according to his Folly*. — Religious Disquisitions, and especially Religious Disputes, are not to be enter'd upon without great Caution. None should be officious and forward in introducing the Subject in common Conversation, or where it is only to supply the Place of ordinary Topicks of Discourse. And if in mix'd Company it be introduc'd, and a Disposition to hear the *Words of Truth and Soberness* be manifestly wanting, it will generally, if not always, be prudent in us to keep Silence, or, if need be, to retire; for besides that the Circumstances we are in are notoriously improper for such Conversation, Disputants of the Kind we shall there meet with never aim at a fair Enquiry after Truth, but at satisfying an impertinent Curiosity; never desire Information or Conviction so much as to display their Ingenuity, their Wit, or Raillery, on a Subject that is not to be thought

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of but with Reverence.—There may be however Times and Places which common Sense will best distinguish, where in most select Companies we may be fairly call'd upon to enter into Argument, either for the Sake of satisfying Men's real Doubts, or lest some well-meaning Person should conclude Arguments unanswerable merely for Want of some Reply. In these Cases we are to shew ourselves faithful Soldiers of Jesus Christ by defending the Truth of his holy Religion with sound Argument, Coolness, and good Manners.

In the next Place, in order to stop the Growth of Infidelity, it will be prudent upon all proper Occasions to enlarge, both in publick and private, on the great Utility of the Gospel, to display the Excellency of it's Reward — to shew how beneficial, or rather how necessary, it is for the Support of Civil Society; how much it hath reform'd the World from Corruptions, not only by teaching true and refin'd Notions of the Deity, but by enforcing all the Precepts of Morality which in Fact ever were in some Sort a dead Letter, little understood and less practis'd by the Bulk of Mankind, till they were establish'd by the Law of God.—Let me not here be misunderstood: I am not resting the Truth of the Gospel merely on it's Utility, or it's Correspondency with the Fitness of Things: I well know it's Divine Foundation *is built on the surer Word of Prophecy, on Signs and Wonders and mighty Deeds*: But if Men are convinc'd of the Purity of it's Precepts, and it's general Tendency

cy to advance the Happiness of Men, and the Peace and good Order of Societies, they will be thereby induc'd to examine into the Grounds of it fairly and impartially : This is really all that is wanting : A Man of common Understanding who will only attend to the Variety of concurrent Proofs that support the Gospel, will see the whole so fully and clearly authenticated by the Finger of God, that he cannot without doing Violence to his Reason withhold his Assent.--- In short, Infidelity can never make any Progress unless where Men are prejudic'd by their Vices against Religion, or where they will not be at the Pains of a fair Examination and Enquiry.

Lastly, in order to prevent the Encroachments of Infidelity, we ought to be very diligent in guarding against the Inroads of Enthusiasm and Heresy : The first by it's ridiculous Absurdities always affords Matter of Triumph to the Infidel, the latter is too frequently Infidelity itself in Disguise.---Farther, our Enemies are well aware (tho' all of us are not so) of the great Advantage Christianity has reap'd from the Establishment of the Church of *England*, which hath stood for so many Years a Bulwark against Superstition and Impiety, a Model of that Primitive Church founded by Christ and his Apostles, e're it was corrupted by the Inventions of Men. Her Members have exerted themselves so effectually in the Defence of Genuine Christianity, and in confuting the Errours of False Religion, that it is no Wonder her Constitution should be formidable alike to Infidels and Pa-

pists: Hence both have conspir'd to weaken her Interests and to lessen her Influence. A Separation from her Communion on various Pretences has been encourag'd and defended. --- He who hath the Honour of being call'd to the Office of the Priesthood after her truly apostolical Institution, will think himself oblig'd to study and defend her Polity, to maintain her Doctrines agreeable as they are to the Word of God, and to conform exactly to her Ceremonies; he will be active and vigilant in preventing the Growth of Schism, and in bringing those into her Pale who have hitherto shut themselves out: Well knowing that it is from the Union of Protestants alone, under God, that we shall be able to make head against the combin'd Forces of Popery and Infidelity, which in this Case, and many others, have one common Cause, and certainly promote the Encrease of each other.-- Nor let this be deem'd a narrow Way of thinking; for whatever may be said of the Benevolence of Latitudinarian Principles, it is but too likely such Principles are too closely connected with Deism. He who hath learnt to think all Constitutions in the Christian Church of equal Authority, will probably soon go a Step farther, and become indifferent not only to all Modes of Worship, but to all Systems of Religion. However, it is necessary that we take great Care (whilst we are open and steady Advocates for the Church of *England*) that we avoid all Appearance of Clamour and furious Zeal: For, besides that these are more apt to breed uncharitable

ritable Strife than Conviction, Clamour and Noise are the constant Voice of Prejudice, and will be mistaken for it even where they proceed from better Causes : Besides, it is certain that more Service will be done to the Church by a calm and steady Attachment to her Doctrines and Discipline, than by the most active Zeal, if attended with the Appearance of Passion or of Fury.

It is now Time we should take a View of the Christian Minister in a more humble Station, but by no means an unimportant one, contending with the Ignorance and Obstinacy of the lower Class of People. A Man of Learning and Education may be at first startled at the gross Ignorance that he will sometimes be a Witness to ; he must take care however not to despise those whom it is his Duty to instruct, he must be easy of Access, and ready to satisfy the Doubts and Scruples of the meanest People, how frivolous soever they are in themselves : Nothing must be beneath his Regard by which a well-meaning Brother may be offended. And in general in all his Discourses he must endeavour to teach the plainest Rudiments of Christianity in the plainest Way ; whatever is above the Capacity of his Audience must be studiously avoided ; he must labour rather to be understood than admir'd, rather to be useful than to acquire the Reputation of Learning merely from being unintelligible. Ignorance indeed, if join'd with Self-conceit, which is sometimes the Case, is incapable of Remedy ; and indeed where Persons are
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grown up without any Education, we shall be disappointed if we expect they will make any great Progress in Learning, however diligent we are in teaching: Let none of us then neglect to sow the Seeds of Christian Knowledge in the younger Minds.—Short and judicious Explanations of our Church Catechism may probably have an excellent Effect on the rising Generation, and may make them Proof against Enthusiasts, who never fail making a Prey of the ignorant, and are often seen to lead whole Multitudes after them in a Phrenzy, if the Diligence or proper Conduct of the Minister doth not prevent it.

The Perverseness of these People is the Effect of their low Education and is sometimes a grievous Torment to their Teacher. It is highly necessary for their own Sake as well as his, that he preserve a due Authority amongst them. This will be most likely to be effected by an affable, courteous, but yet a manly Behaviour. An Affectation of Superiority will have the Appearance of Pride which is always disgustful, and they will not fail to mortify it sufficiently by the most provoking Insolence and ill-bred Contempt. A Superiority is therefore to be maintain'd without much Appearance of it: A prudent Man whilst he disdains not to treat the meanest of his Flock with Civility and Kindness, and to oblige them in lesser Matters, will take care never to comply with them when they are unreasonable, nor will he on any Account descend so low as to admit them into any Thing like a rude Familiarity

rity with him : And if from his general Conduct they once entertain a good Opinion of his Character and Abilities, and learn to think him their real Friend, he need not fear they will treat him with Respect ; he will be hearken'd to on all Occasions, his Reproofs will always have their full Weight, when they are persuaded that all his Admonitions are intended for their Good.

Again : Prudence will direct us to have an especial Regard to our own personal Conduct in Times of political Contests. We must first take great heed lest Warmth of Temper at those Seasons should hurry us into such Behaviour as we shall condemn in our cooler Moments.—As to the Part that we may be oblig'd to bear in them ourselves, it is without Doubt our Duty to act agreeably to our own Judgment in such Manner as seems to us most conducive to the Interest of our King and Country.—No reasonable Man can censure us for this:—But we must be very cautious lest Zeal for what we think a good Cause should transport us so far as to make us forgetful of Christian Charity. On the contrary, we should labour to remove all contracted Notions which Party may inspire in others, and shew our own Benevolence by rescuing, as far as we can, worthy Characters from that Torrent of Detraction and Abuse which always prevails on such Occasions ; and by carefully allowing due Commendation to real Worth wherever we meet with it. Personal Merit is most certainly not confin'd to any one Set of Men, and may, no doubt, be found in those who differ very
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widely in their political Sentiments. --- By such Behaviour we may hope to be on friendly Terms with those who differ from us in Opinion, and may perhaps be the happy Instruments of reconciling Differences, and promoting Unity and Concord.---But if on the other Hand, we are found to foment civil Discord, to inflame, instead of soothing, the Madness of Party Zeal; if we become the low Agents of any Faction, we must not expect that our Exhortations to Peace and Charity will have any Weight; our Lot will most probably be, to be hated by our Adversaries, and despis'd at the Bottom even by those in whose Service we have prostituted our Office and our Characters.

As to the Poverty and Distresses of the inferior Clergy, a few Words shall suffice. They are in their humble Station to shew their Wisdom by Frugality and Contentment: This may be thought an hard Lesson; but surely it is not unreasonable that they themselves should learn that Virtue which they every Day preach to others. ---Besides, it is their real Interest to learn it; for it seems very certain that he who eats the Bread of Poverty in a lower Station of Life, free from the Tortures of Ambition and Discontent, is by far more happy than those who in more affluent Circumstances, are in a State of servile Dependency, or endeavouring to advance themselves by such means as will wound their Conscience and destroy their Repose. Besides, whatever Faults the present Age may be justly chargeable with, Want of Humanity is most certainly not one of the
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the Number. A Man of Integrity and Character will be most likely to find Friends, who though they may not be able to advance him in Life, will not suffer him to want the Necessaries and Conveniences of it. If any farther Motive to Contentment be wanting, let him remember that his Blessed Lord *had not where to lay his Head*, and that he is in the Service of a gracious Master, who will never permit the *Righteous to be utterly forsaken, nor his Seed to beg their Bread*.

I am sensible that I have by no means touch'd upon all the Difficulties we are to expect in the Discharge of our Office, and that there are many other Cases in which we may be put to severe Trials. I shall easily be excus'd from entering minutely into any farther Particulars; the great Variety of Tempers, Characters, and Circumstances that we must be engag'd with at several Times, will make it endless to attempt a particular Description of each. But in general, Prudence must be our Guide in all Cases; it is essentially necessary in every Branch of our Duty; it must influence every Part of our Conduct, or our Conduct cannot be unblameable: Our Admonitions will have no Effect without it, and even a right Action will often lose it's Merit by being done in an improper Manner.

All our Discretion however will be in vain, if we do not add to the *Wisdom of Serpents* the *Harmlessness of Doves*. Prudence will be justly call'd low Cunning, Craft or Subtlety, if Integrity of Life and Conversation be wanting.---I need not enlarge on this Subject; every Man feels the

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Force

Force of that cutting Rebuke--*Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* I shall therefore only observe, that it is not enough that a Clergyman's moral Character be unblameable; such Innocence as is worthless is here extremely criminal. He is to *be instant in Season and out of Season*, to labour for the Salvation of his own Soul as well as those committed to his Care, and must therefore be active and vigilant in the Discharge of his Office. Should this be neglected, and his holy Function be consider'd merely as an Addition to his Revenues in Life--Let him know that he is guilty of betraying his Trust, his Lord and Master's Cause; and *woe unto that Man by whom the Son of Man is thus betray'd, better were it for him he had never been born.*

Upon the Whole, we ought to be thankful that we are not fallen into such Times as might require us to lay down our Lives for the Truth. We have the quiet Enjoyment of our Religion and Worship; God grant we ever may.—Difficulties, 'tis true, we have to combat with, and these must be expected whilst the Church is in a militant State.--But whatever we have to distress us, let us look up to the Excellency of the Reward that awaits those who *fight a good Fight* and acquit themselves well in this State of Trial. This holy Hope will animate us to follow the Examples of those who have gone before us, and like them we shall *continue stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord*, as sur'd as we are, that *our Labour will not be in vain in the Lord.*

F I N I S.